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McFarlane Lists U.S. Actions In Aid of Nicaragua Rebels

Reagan Aide Says Congressional Ban Not Violated

By Robert Parry
Associated Press

After last year's congressional ban on "directly or indirectly" giving military aid to rebels fighting the government of Nicaragua, the White House continued to give them political advice and—once last spring—urged the rebels to suspend fighting, a senior administration official says.

In a Sept. 5 letter, national security affairs adviser Robert C. McFarlane depicted an active White House campaign to help the rebels politically, but denied that those actions violated the congressional ban on even indirect military help for counterrevolutionary forces, also called contras, fighting Nicaragua's leftist government.

"I can state with deep personal conviction that at no time did I or any member of the National Security Council staff violate the letter or spirit of the law" which took effect last Oct. 1, McFarlane said in a letter to Rep. Lee H. Hamilton (D-Ind.), chairman of the Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence.

Following press reports that NSC officials had given the contras advice on private fund-raising and military tactics, three con-

gressional panels began reviewing possible violations of the ban, known as the Boland amendment after its sponsor, Rep. Edward P. Boland (D-Mass.).

The amendment, which expires Sept. 30, bars the Central Intelligence Agency, the Defense Department or any other "entity of the United States involved in intelligence activities [from spending money] for the purpose or which would have the effect of supporting, directly or indirectly, military or paramilitary operations in Nicaragua."

According to McFarlane's letter, White House efforts included:

- Advising contra leaders on the importance of lobbying Congress and "explaining their cause to the [American] public."
- Urging punishment of rebels found guilty of atrocities.
- Seeking a broader political coalition.
- Recommending a halt to military attacks last spring after the rebels demanded a dialogue with the Sandinista government. At that time, Congress was also considering President Reagan's plan to resume lethal military aid to the rebels.

Administration and contra sources, who insisted on anonymity, have said U.S. officials helped write a key rebel political doc-

ument early this year and pressed the chief U.S.-backed contra army to form a coalition with moderate political leaders.

In his letter, McFarlane confirmed that the administration "urged that [the contras] forge a representative political front involving credible nonmilitary figures and that this front take responsibility for framing a political program centered on achieving a peaceful, democratic evolution in Nicaragua."

McFarlane said this effort led to March 1 declaration in San Jose, Costa Rica, by the rebels of the Nicaraguan Democratic Force (FDN) and civilian opposition leaders, including Arturo Cruz, a former official of Nicaragua's Sandinista government.

The declaration demanded that the Sandinista government accept a church-mediated dialogue and new elections and warned that if progress toward these goals did not occur before April 20, "the possibility of a peaceful solution to the national crisis" would end.

McFarlane wrote that "as this process began to mature this past spring," the contras were encouraged to "desist from military activities," and the United States emphasized "a political rather than a military solution."

"Our emphasis on a political rather than a military solution to the situation was as close as we ever came to influencing the military aspect of their struggle," McFarlane wrote. In the letter, he also denied that NSC officials solicited "funds or other support for military or paramilitary activities either from Americans or third parties."